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SUBJECT The Hostage Crisis

BOB SCHIEFFER: American ships in the Eastern Mediterranean suggest one U.S. option in the hostage crisis, a naval blockade of Lebanon. Even among the most experienced foreign policy experts, there is a dispute over military action and whether it would be wise. Three such experts are with us this morning: In Washington, the former CIA Director, Admiral Stansfield Turner; and Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll, now with the Center for Defense Information. And here in New York, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, retired Chief of Naval Operations.

When we invited all of you to be here, gentlemen, we were going to talk about what President Reagan said yesterday: Is, in fact, it possible to carry out something like a blockade or something? But we've had these developments overnight, so let's start talking about that just a little bit.

Can this help, Admiral Zumwalt, what Nabih Berri has said this morning, that he's now willing to move these people to another embassy in Beirut, or to Damascus, if some kind of promise can be made that they will stay there until the Shiites in Israel are released?

ADMIRAL ELMO ZUMWALT: Well, this represents progress. I would hope that no public promise will be made, because that would be a backdown by President Reagan.

I think the significant point to be made about military power is that it is being effective. The military power, the presence of it there is, in part, the reason that Nabih Berri has been brought by Syria and Moscow to be more reasonable.

SCHIEFFER: So you see this as a direct response to what

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President Reagan said yesterday.

ADMIRAL ZUMWALT: Oh, I think it's very clearly.

SCHIEFFER: Gentlemen down in Washington, what's your view?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Well, I think that this is good progress. If we can just get the hostages into the hands of someone not as unscrupulous as are these hijackers, that's real progress because the hostages themselves will be more safe.

I agree with Bud Zumwalt that it's very difficult for us at this point to fully accede to the request to release all 700-and-some prisoners. But it's just a matter of nuances now on how that gets worked out. I think the makings for an agreement are certainly moving along nicely.

SCHIEFFER: And Admiral Carroll, would you agree with that?

REAR ADMIRAL EUGENE CARROLL: I definitely agree that we'll all feel better if we have those hostages in hands other than the Shiites.

On the other hand, the motives for them to move the hostages into safer surroundings seem to me to be something other than military. I suspect that strong voices are coming through the diplomatic channel, through Syria particularly, to the Shiites to be more forthcoming. I don't believe that anyone really considers that the Nimitz task group is going to go into action, because that would doom the hostages.

ADMIRAL ZUMWALT: Well, you know, the key thing that brought Syria to lean on Berri is the presence of the Sixth Fleet there. The Syrians don't want to have to see it get into a situation where they would lose their airpower as a result of a strike by the U.S.S. Nimitz. The Soviet Union doesn't want to have to come to the assistance of Syria. And therefore the presence of our task force is serving as it ought to: a deterrent which is bringing about a peaceful solution.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask all of you, as military men, is it in fact possible to do what the President suggested yesterday, and that is to blockade, cut off the Shiite areas of Lebanon? Or was it -- should we take this in another way, that the President was simply saying, "We're going to get tough"? Did he really mean that literally, what he said literally? Is that possible to carry out?

ADMIRAL ZUMWALT: Well, I think the President did mean

to convey a signal and a symbolic message.

It would be an extremely difficult thing to blockade a specific piece of territory in Lebanon. In order for a blockade to be effective, you'd really have to include Syria and you'd have to get some cooperation from Israel and Jordan, as well as Turkey. And you've have to not only do it by sea, but by land, through all those allies.

SCHIEFFER: Is it something that is possible to do, or is there at least a chance of carrying it off? Should we in fact try something like this, or is it just too hard?

Admiral Turner and Admiral Carroll.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think it can be done if we go back to something Bud Zumwalt helped arrange during the Vietnam War, and that's through mining. We mined Hanoi quite effectively. You can cut off Lebanon from the sea by mining. And it has the beauty that it puts the onus on the other side to take the first action that would be lethal -- that is, running over the mines.

But as Bud's just pointed out, you cannot isolate Lebanon entirely because of all of the land routes into it. You're not going to actually make them starve, but you can run their economy down somewhat.

SCHIEFFER: There was also some suggestion, Admiral Carroll, that the airport be closed. Do you think that's feasible?

ADMIRAL CARROLL: Well, that's entirely feasible. That could be closed in a matter of moments, either by gunfire or by air attack. However, the question remains, why are you going to close the airport? That's kind of like bombing a bank after it's been robbed in order to punish the criminals. There's nothing to be gained by closing that airport, other than to insure that the hostages become vulnerable.

SCHIEFFER: Bud Zumwalt?

ADMIRAL ZUMWALT: At some point it may be wise, in this or in other crises, to close that airport, so that it can't be used as a landing and take-off point for terrorists in possession of an aircraft. That's something that would be quite feasible, and something that if it were done quickly could have some impact.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I want to thank all of you for being here this morning.